



Making Nova Scotia's Lakes Loon Friendly

**A project of Bird Studies Canada
With funding from the Nova Scotia Habitat Conservation Fund**

2003-2004 Annual Report

**Becky Whittam, Atlantic Canada Program Manager
June 2004**

Goals and Objectives

The goal of this project is to educate lake users about how their actions affect loon breeding and foraging habitat through existing programs (BSC's *Canadian Lakes Loon Survey (CCLS)* and *Loon Friendly Lakes Campaign*, and EHJV's *Loon Stewards*), and through a Loon Ambassadors Program in NS.

Our objectives for 2003 were to: 1) Promote loon and lake conservation through the management of a Loon Ambassadors Program in Nova Scotia; and 2) Gather additional data on loons, loon habitat, and the threats they face by continuing to promote the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey in Nova Scotia.

Results

Objective 1 – Promote loon and lake conservation through Loon Ambassadors Program

Our Loon Ambassadors (Etta Parker, Sara Jane Snook & Elizabeth Dickson in Halifax; Judy Beaton in Stillwater Lake; Stephen & Sharon Hawboldt in Granville Ferry; Faye Singleton in Hantsport, Jack Stone in Williamswood and Katherine Dickson in New Waterford) accomplished the following:

Loon alert signs

Reg Newell of the NS DNR provided Loon Alert signs to ambassadors in Fall 2003. Sarah Jane Snook offered to put a Loon Nesting sign on Fancy Lake, Lunenburg Co. Judy Beaton offered to post two signs on Stillwater Lake and on Sherbrooke Lake in Lunenburg Co. Etta Parker offered to post signs on Sandy Lake, Big Indian Lake, Lake Egmont, Porters Lake, Chezzetcook Lake, Cranberry Lake, and Mill Lake (all in Halifax County). She also offered to put several signs up in Cottage County Lakes at Martock, Hants County.

Brochure distribution

All ambassadors distributed at least 100 Loon Friendly Lakes brochures to stores and other locations in their region. Jack Stone distributed about 500 brochures to Canadian Tire at Spryfield and Irving on Old Sambro road. John McLaughlin, not an official ambassador, distributed 50 Loon Friendly Lakes brochures in the Black River Lake Association newsletter in May 2003. Etta Parker distributed hundreds of brochures to the following locations:

- a. L & D Convenience Store, Kempt, N.S.
- b. Wiles Market, Wileville, N.S.
- c. Keji National Park Visitor Centre
- d. M&W Restaurant, Maitland Bridge, N.S. (Also, in adjacent store)
- e. Mersey River Chalets, Maitland Bridge, N.S.
- f. Riverview Lodge, Bangs Falls, Greenfield, N.S.
- g. Milford House, Milford, N.S.
- h. Evangeline Inn and Restaurant, Grand Pre, N.S.

Other outreach by ambassadors

Etta Parker produced a Loon Display at the R.V. Show, Exhibition Grounds, Halifax County, and did an informal presentation to the turtle research people around the campfire at Kejimikujik National Park. Etta also participated in the Loon Surveys at Keji National Park in June and August.

Outreach by BSC staff

- BSC distributed a press release in May 2003 concerning lead poisoning and loons (attached).
- In June 2003 Ramsey Hart attended the NS Federation of Naturalists' Annual General Meeting to promote the Loon Friendly Lakes project and other BSC programs.
- In August 2003, an article in the Yarmouth Vanguard was printed featuring an interview with CLLS volunteer Mardi Amirault.
- BSC staff helped Grade 11 student Julie Amirault from Barrington Municipal High School with her Research Paper on Biology of the Common Loon.
- BSC staff corresponded with, and sent brochures to, the Pictou County Paddle & Oar club, a recreational paddle club that occasionally encounters loons on their inland waterway trips. The club secretary wrote to BSC asking for advice on how best to deal with these encounters. The secretary also offered to hand out Loon Friendly Lakes brochures to their members at their next general meeting.

- In November 2003 an Ambassador Workshop was held to discuss plans for 2004. The press release related to this workshop is attached. Participants agreed to focus on the issue of lead fishing gear and school programs in 2004. As a result of the promotion for the workshop Ramsey Hart of BSC was interviewed by the Maritime Noon radio show on CBC Radio 1. The publicity from the workshop also attracted the attention of several potential Ambassadors for 2004. The agenda for the workshop is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Agenda, Loon Ambassador Workshop, November 27, 2003, Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History

| | |
|------|---|
| 7:00 | Welcome and Introductions, Ramsey Hart |
| 7:10 | The Canadian Lakes Loon Survey and Loons in Nova Scotia, Joe Kerekes |
| 7:25 | Recent Research on Loons, Ramsey Hart |
| 7:40 | The Loon Ambassador Program – Current Activities, Etta Parker |
| 7:50 | Loons in the classroom – developing programs for school outreach, Ramsey Hart |
| 8:10 | Questions and discussion |
| 8:30 | Refreshments with Nova Scotia Bird Society |

CLLS 20 year report

Bird Studies Canada produced “Celebrating 20 years of the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey” (see attached). This 6 page glossy document was distributed to all members of Bird Studies Canada (over 6,000 people) in the Spring issue of *BirdWatch Canada*. The document focuses on the origin and growth of the CLLS over time, as well as some of the lessons we have learned from the program.

School curriculum

BSC staff person Abby Porter produced a draft document, “Nova Scotia Elementary School Curriculum and the Loon Ambassador Program”. This document is attached. We hope to have additional materials produced, including a presentation geared at middle school students, by August 2004 so that Loon Ambassadors and BSC staff can make presentations to schools in Fall 2004.

Objective II – Canadian Lakes Loon Survey Recruitment Drive

The number of participants in the CLLS increased from 43 to 53 in 2003-2004. This number is consistent with the number of participants in 2001-2002. In January 2004, BSC increased its membership fee from \$25 to \$35. CLLS participants must pay this membership fee in order to participate in the program. We are hoping that the increase in participant fees will not greatly impact recruitment to the CLLS in 2004-2005.

Attachments

1. Nova Scotia Elementary School Curriculum and the Loon Ambassador Program
2. May 2003 Press Release
3. November 2003 Press Release
4. Media clipping – Yarmouth Vanguard, August 2003.
5. CLLS 20 year report

Nova Scotia Elementary School Curriculum and the Loon Ambassador Program

Abby Porter
Bird Studies Canada
December 2003

Given the restrictions of time faced by classroom teachers, it is important that programs offered by outside agencies such as BSC and the Loon Ambassadors are closely tied with existing curriculum requirements. Fortunately, because of their broad appeal and cultural status, teaching about loons can cross many disciplines including the Science, Music, Drama, Visual Arts, and English Language Arts components of the existing curriculum. It is not recommended that further activities or components be added to the existing Loon Ambassador classroom presentation for Music, Drama, Visual Arts, and English Language Arts as this may make it too lengthy and require more from volunteers than is desirable. Rather, a kit with extra activities could be created so that each Ambassador can leave this with the teacher after delivering the program. These additional activities should satisfy certain curriculum requirements while reviewing key points of the Ambassador presentation and continuing to educate students on the natural history and conservation of the loons and their aquatic habitats in Nova Scotia.

Science

The curriculum components for elementary science are well defined and divided into goals for each grade level. These divisions would allow for integration of the Loon Ambassador program into the school curriculum

Grade 1:

One area that is covered during this year is “Needs and Characteristics of Living Things.” One portion of the Ambassador presentation talks about loon sensitivity to humans, as well as incubation and the needs of chicks when they are born (i.e. how the parents feed/carry them until they are strong enough). A large part of the presentation discusses the threats to Loons in Atlantic Canada (i.e. shoreline development, acid rain, mercury, boaters). The idea that Loons need quiet backwater and protection from boaters can fit into this component of the curriculum. This is an area that BSC and the Loon Ambassadors should look at refining so that it is more compatible with the NS school curriculum.

Grade 2:

“Animal Growth and Changes” is a section of this year’s program. The Loon Ambassador presentation talks about the birth and growth of Loon chicks, as well as how it is that Loons are such good divers. This is an area that can be evaluated for better integration.

Grade 3-4:

The “Living Things and Environments” section of the Grades 3 and 4 curricula may allow for better integration between lessons and the presentation.

Grade 5-6:

Unit 1, “Communities of Living Things” would allow the discussion of Loons as top predators and the concept of trophic levels covered in the Loon presentation to overlap with teaching in this area. Further development could be done here in the presentation to ensure that key components are covered.

Music

The Elementary School Curriculum stresses the idea that learning about music at this stage in school, “...makes a specific and essential contributions to intellectual and aesthetic development, the education of feeling, [and] the exploration of values....”

Suggestions to Teachers :

- Design a section of your music classes around the idea of nature and the calls of animal in the wild as music.
- Play the call of the loon along with various other animals (whales, birds, wolves, etc.) and then ask the children about what s/he feels when hearing these sounds. Is this musical? How might learning to recognize the call of a loon or any other animal help to protect these creatures?

Drama

“Through drama experiences students gain opportunities to increase their understanding of others, themselves and the world around them...deeper their understanding of cultural and social traditions....a wide variety of drama strategies can be used to explore themes, stretch thinking, [and] solve problems.”

Suggestion to Teachers:

- Challenge your students to create short skits on one aspect of the Loon Ambassador presentation.
- Have the children perform their skits for the class
- Have the students discuss their thoughts and feelings about each others performances.

By having students perform their skits in front of the class and then asking the children to react to each other’s dramatic expression, work is being done to satisfy components of the English Language Arts program. English Language Arts is divided into three sections, one of which is “Speaking and Listening.” By creating and performing short plays students are inherently, “develop[ing] an understanding and effective use of oral language and enhanc[ing] their capacity to express themselves in formal and informal situations.” Also by having the discussion following presentation of the skits teachers will be engaging students to, “use talk in small and large groups to explore, extend, clarify, and reflect on their thoughts, ideas, feelings, and experiences.”

The experience of writing a skit itself further integrates the Loon Ambassador presentation into the “Writing and Other Ways of Representing” portion of English Language Arts. Writing a small dramatic skit allows students the chance to learn, “to create texts collaboratively and independently, using a variety of forms for a range of audiences and purposes” as well as learning how to, “use writing and other ways of representing to explore, clarify, and reflect on their thoughts, feelings and experiences...and to use their imagination.”

Visual Arts

“Students work both individually and collaboratively to solve problems and respond to ideas and experiences by making and examining visual arts....Activities might include painting, drawing, sculpting, weaving, and exploring puppetry.”

Suggestions to Teachers:

- Have students draw, paint, or sketch a part of the Loon Ambassador presentation that they felt was important.
- Discuss with students why they chose to show that particular part of the presentation. Why do they think it is important? What does that particular scene mean to them? Again, by asking these questions and having the students speak about their own feelings and reactions to the art work you are not only satisfying components of the Visual Arts curriculum but the English Language Arts areas as well.
- Have students create their own loon using a variety of materials and textures. When creating the loons, you could review with students the key identifying characteristics of the Common Loon covered by the Loon Ambassador.

English Language Arts

The English Language Arts program is divided into three component parts; Speaking and Listening, Reading and Viewing, and Writing and Other Ways of Representing. Some suggestions on how the teacher can integrate the Loon Ambassador program into the Speaking and Listening area of the program have already been made.

Suggestions for Teachers; Reading and Viewing

- Create a class story about the “Adventures of Louis the Loon” (for example).
- Have students suggest ideas for his adventures, characters in the story, and the lesson that can be learned from Louis. By having students discuss the parts of the story in small groups the, “focused small group talk” that is “an essential to English Language Arts classrooms” is met.
- Have students help illustrate the story as well, integrating Visual Arts into the overall outcome of the project.

Suggestions for Teachers; Writing and Other Ways of Representing

- Have students produce a small piece of writing on the subject of the Loon Ambassador presentation. Have them answer a list of questions in their writing

about topics covered by the Ambassador in addition to the student's own reflections on the visit.

- See Drama for other ways of covering components of this curriculum through the Loon Ambassador presentation

Host a "Parents Loon Education Night". Have your students create artwork, readings, and skits on the subject of Loon Protection and the topics they learn about during the Loon Ambassador presentation and then have them "teach" their parents. This event allows the student to showcase their work while meeting various curriculum criteria for the teacher, and allows the message of Loon Protection to reach more than just the student in the classroom.

French Second Language

Suggestion to Teachers:

- Core French teachers can teach French vocabulary words to students to integrate the presentation into the Core French lessons
- Immersion teachers can create similar activities as those suggested in this document, conducted in French

MEDIA RELEASE

Fishing season not just for people

May 4, 2003 – The fishing season has started for both people and loons in Atlantic Canada.

Loons, like people, fish on Atlantic Canada's thousands of lakes each year. They also nest and raise their young on the shores of these lakes.

May 4-11 is Loon Awareness Week, a perfect time to remind people to share their space with loons. Bird Studies Canada recommends the following: When fishing, use non-lead alternatives for fishing jigs and sinkers, as lead products poison many loons and other waterfowl each year. Don't discard fishing line in or near the lake, as loons can get entangled in this line while fishing themselves. Slow down when driving your boat in shallow water or near the shore, or when you see loons nearby. And finally, help keep the shoreline where loons nest natural by reducing the size of your lawn, preserving natural vegetation, using phosphate-free products, and avoiding oil and gas spills. The loons will thank you for it!

If you're interested in helping to monitor loons in Atlantic Canada, you can join the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey and keep track of how many young "your" loons produce each year. The Canadian Lakes Loon Survey is a program of Bird Studies Canada (BSC); participants are asked to become members of BSC for an annual \$25 membership fee. BSC is a non-profit organization dedicated to bird research and conservation across the country.

For more information on how to make your lake loon friendly, or on the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey, contact Bird Studies Canada toll-free at 1-888-448-2473, or visit the website at www.bsc-eoc.org/cllsmain.html.

- 30 -

For more information, contact:

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Bird Studies Canada thanks the Nova Scotia Habitat Conservation Fund for its support of the CLLS.

Digital photos available upon request

La pêche, les Plongeurs huards s'y adonnent aussi

Le 4 mai 2003 – La saison de la pêche est maintenant amorcée au Canada atlantique, et les personnes ne sont pas les seules à s'adonner à cette activité. En effet, les milliers de lacs de la région sont aussi fréquentés par les Plongeurs huards, un magnifique oiseau qui pêche, niche et élève ses petits dans cet environnement.

La Semaine des Plongeurs huards, qui se déroule du 4 au 11 mai, offre une bonne occasion de sensibiliser les gens à la présence des plongeurs. Études d'Oiseaux Canada (ÉOC) en profite pour recommander aux pêcheurs d'utiliser un matériau autre que le plomb pour leurs articles de pêche. Un grand nombre d'oiseaux, que ce soit des plongeurs ou d'autres espèces de sauvagine, meurent chaque année des suites d'un empoisonnement après avoir ingéré des pesées ou des turluttés en plomb. ÉOC invite également les pêcheurs à ne laisser aucun fil de pêche derrière eux lorsqu'ils quittent un endroit, que ce soit dans le lac ou près de celui-ci. ÉOC incite également les gens à ralentir la vitesse de leur embarcation lorsqu'ils circulent en eaux peu profondes, près du rivage et lorsqu'ils aperçoivent des plongeurs. Enfin, ÉOC encourage les gens à garder les rives près desquelles nichent les plongeurs à l'état naturel en réduisant l'étendue des pelouses, en préservant la végétation naturelle qui s'y trouve, en utilisant des produits exempts de phosphate et en évitant d'y déverser de l'essence ou d'autres produits nocifs. Ces actions permettront de rendre la vie des plongeurs tellement plus agréable!

Les personnes qui sont intéressées à contribuer au suivi des plongeurs au Canada atlantique peuvent le faire en participant à l'Inventaire canadien des Plongeurs huards d'Études d'Oiseaux Canada. Faites parvenir vos données concernant le nombre de jeunes que le couple de plongeurs que vous observez sur votre lac produit chaque année. L'inscription au programme est de 25 \$ par année ce qui vous permet de devenir membre d'ÉOC. ÉOC est un organisme à but non lucratif qui a pour mission d'étudier et de conserver les oiseaux à travers le pays.

Pour obtenir de l'information concernant les façons de rendre votre lac plus attrayant pour les plongeurs ou sur l'Inventaire canadien des Plongeurs huards, communiquez avec Études d'Oiseaux Canada au 1-888-448-2473 ou encore, visitez notre site Internet à www.bsc-eoc.org/icphprinc.html.

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Pour plus d'information, communiquez avec :

Becky Whittam

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EOC remercie le Nova Scotia Habitat Conservation Fund pour le soutien qu'il apporte à l'Inventaire canadien des Plongeurs huards.

Des photos numériques sont disponibles sur demande.

November 19 2003

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Loon Ambassadors to Meet in Halifax November 27

Loons are a beloved symbol of Nova Scotia's lakes and natural areas – they are also a species which can be sensitive to human intrusion. In Nova Scotia, loons have North America's highest concentrations of mercury, a toxic metal known to cause impacts on the breeding success of loons and other wildlife. Are Nova Scotia's loons holding their own against the jet skis and toxic metals? This is a question that participants of the Canadian Loon Lakes Survey (CLLS) are helping to answer. The CLLS is volunteer-based national survey of lakes which measures the presence and breeding success of Common Loons. The CLLS is coordinated by Bird Studies Canada. In Nova Scotia the CLLS is supported by a corps of Loon Ambassadors which actively promote both the survey and loon conservation and awareness.

On November 27 (7 pm) current Loon Ambassadors, those interested in getting involved in the CLLS as surveyors or Ambassadors and others interested in and concerned about loons will be gathering at the Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History. The agenda for this workshop includes presentations and discussion on the status of loons in Nova Scotia, recent research findings, the CLLS in Nova Scotia and activities of the Ambassadors in 2004. A short presentation will be made by Joe Kerekes, who has been studying loons in Atlantic Canada throughout his long career with the Canadian Wildlife Service. Anyone interested in participating in this workshop is welcome to attend providing they RSVP to Ramsey Hart at Bird Studies Canada (ramsey.hart@ec.gc.ca 506-364-5047).

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Bird Studies Canada thanks the Nova Scotia Habitat Conservation Fund for its support of the CLLS.

Collecting data about loon population

by CARLA ALLEN
Vanguard Staff Writer

Acid rain continues to be a concern in Eastern Canada and may partly explain why loons in Atlantic Canada are not doing as well as loons in the west. However, according to recent data, our loon population is showing a gradual increase.

Blood samples taken from loons in Kejimikujik lakes contained the highest levels of Mercury of any loon population in North America in 1998.

Research has shown that Mercury exposure affects loon chicks, causing aberrational behavior. They expend excess energy preening and less time brooding.

Participants in the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey have collected information on nesting loons since 1981.

Mardi Amirault lives near Island Pond Lake and has been a member of the CLLS for about 15 years.

"The situation is that they are still collecting data and research but at the last report the trends were looking just a tiny bit more favorable," she said.

Amirault surveys her own lake and doesn't have a problem finding loons.

"Most days I don't have to go looking for them, they come," she said.

She's found the population has not risen on her lake but attributes this to its size, saying it is only large enough to support one adult pair.

"That's all we've ever had, one adult pair. On good years, they will bring off two babies that leave in the fall. This year we have one baby. Two hatched, but one survived," said Amirault.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED
Blood samples taken from loons in Kejimikujik lakes contained the highest levels of Mercury of any loon population in North America in 1998.

She says the same thing happened last year. Four years ago there was a hiatus, with no babies raised. According to Amirault this is not an unusual occurrence.

"Some years, they just take a break. Sometimes they don't even make an attempt," she said.

Several ago, Amirault says they had "quite an interesting summer with the loons." At the end, one of them died and they found the body. They sent the dead bird to PEI for an autopsy which showed the loon had died from swallowing a fishing lure, a common occurrence, said Amirault.

"The loon also had high amounts of mercury in its body," she said.

Research provided by about 30 Nova Scotia volunteer loon surveyors between 1990-2000 showed that nearly 60 per cent of loon pairs being watched raised at least one chick. Of those pairs that raised one chick, nearly two-thirds raised a second chick. Results are based on over 600 observations from several hundred lakes across the province.

According to Amirault there is a great need for more volunteer surveyors in the Yarmouth County area because of the large number of lakes. More data would ultimately provide a more accurate account of local loon populations.

For more information on the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey call 888-448-2473.